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LUCILLA LOPRIORE, SILVIA SPERTI

## Language teacher education within an ELF aware approach: teachers' responses from multilingual contexts

### *Abstract*

This paper presents some of the implications of teaching English within a scenario where new language contacts are modifying it. Among the changes English language has been recently undergoing, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), is the most widely used form of plurilithic communication adopted by people from different language backgrounds. This new condition requires revisiting English language teaching and teacher education focusing on those changes pivotal in learners' language capability development in multilingual contexts. An ELF awareness reflective approach adopted within an English language teacher education course, its pedagogical implications and teachers' responses are presented and discussed. (98 words)

### *Keywords*

ELF awareness; agency; reflective approach; teacher education

### *1. Global mobility and the emerging sociolinguistic reality of English*

The boosting of social fragmentation processes due to the recent migration flows, together with the unrestrained diffusion of new technologies, social networks and multimedia, have created new sociolinguistic contexts where languages are undergoing a unique transformational process of their borders as well as of their traditional functions.

Demographic trends show that the world population will grow to 10 billion by the end of this century and most of this growth takes place in the developing countries where populations are younger and where English is being taught at an earlier and earlier age at school. English has spread all over these countries in addition to the autochthonous languages, but without actually threatening their existence (Knapp 2015:174).

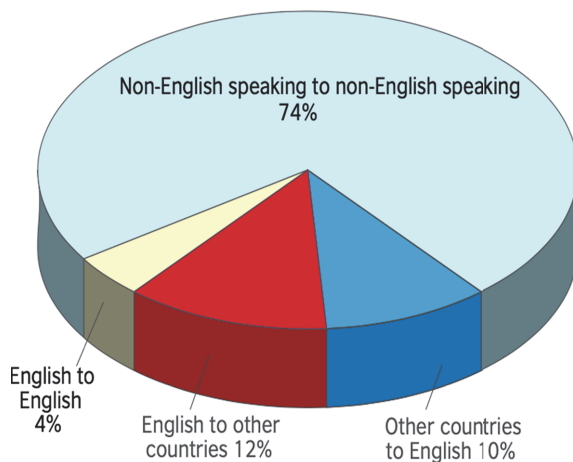
The resulting increase of people mobility has favoured the global spread of languages such as Spanish, Mandarin and Arabic that are now developing as world languages, while the sociolinguistic reality of English has now become much more complex and definitely controversial than those of other languages in the world. This is predominantly due to its global spread, to its emergent role as the mostly

used language in international communication and on the web as well as to the ongoing nativization of non-native Englishes in various parts of the world.

Another feature of currently used English is the growing number of its users that are by large non-native speakers (NNSs) whose use of English is emerging as innovative and creative, thus generating new approaches in English language teaching as well as in language teacher education (Jenkins, 2015; Jenkins, Baker, Dewey, 2018; Kohn, 2018; Seidlhofer, 2011; Sifakis, 2019; Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2018; Widdowson, 2012).

In his 2006 book *English Next*, devoted to the changing status of English in Europe, David Graddol had defined “people on the move”, the numerous migrant workers, refugees, asylum seekers, business workers, international students, peace-keeping troops, mostly moving from former Soviet Union countries to the UK, all non-native speaker adults who would have needed suitable English language courses to meet their integration needs (Graddol, 2006: 219). The pie-chart produced by the World Tourism Organisation and reproduced here (Fig.1), was used by David Graddol to show how in the majority of human interactions in international communication, the proportion of encounters involving a native English speaker had been rapidly declining and leading to a growing role for global English and for coming to terms with the needs of teaching English as an International language (Galloway & Rose, 2015; Matsuda, 2012, 2017). It is in this respect that EU educational policies have highlighted the need to rethink language teaching in view of the current increasingly globalized world as witnessed by the publication of the Council of Europe Companion volume of the CEFR (2020).

Fig. 1 – *International tourism is growing, but the proportion of encounters involving a native English speaker is declining (Graddol, 2006: 29)*



The effects of globalization mostly taking place through English, the implications of the growing diffusion in multilingual contexts of English nativized varieties as well as variations, and of the emerging role of non-native speakers, all require re-

considering both the syllabi and the approaches traditionally used, particularly in language teacher education and in classroom practice, and the acknowledgement of the new perspectives offered by the emergence of English as a lingua franca, because, as highlighted by David Graddol,

“[English is no longer] English as we have known it and have taught it in the past as a foreign language” but “a new phenomenon” now recognized as English as a Lingua Franca. (Graddol 2006: 11)

Revisiting English language teacher education in a time of social changes means focusing first on those aspects of English that the changes this language is undergoing, have highlighted as pivotal in learners' language capability development in multilingual contexts (Cogo, 2018). EL teachers should thus start reconsidering their English teaching practices in multilingual contexts to sustain their learners' language development and to cope with their individual lingua-cultural traits. Issues of identity, standards, proficiency levels, intercultural communication and language awareness of English, demand for a paradigmatic reorientation and for a new construct of language teacher education and classroom practice.

## *2. English as a Lingua Franca (ELF): challenges and new perspectives in language teacher education*

Among the changes English is undergoing, one is the emergence of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), a variation<sup>1</sup> that is establishing itself as the most widely used form of plurilithic communication adopted by people from different language backgrounds to communicate with each other.

ELF represents a gradual shift from the notion of correctness to appropriateness and intelligibility, but English is still taught in schools as a predominantly 'foreign' language. Since ELF effectively allows speakers of different languages to interact with each other and in doing so, it brings their respective L1s into contact, it is necessarily related to multilingualism. ELF is complementary to other manifestations of multilingualism and not at all in conflict with it, mobilizing as it does all the linguistic resources of the interactants, but if it is to serve this complementary function, it is crucial that ELF be dissociated from English as a native language.

ELF has become the main medium of the process of globalization, “ELF is at once a GLOBALIZED and GLOBALIZING phenomenon. (Jenkins, Cogo, Dewey 2011, p. 303)

English as a Lingua Franca is “a contact language between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common national culture, and for whom English is the chosen language of communication” (Firth, 1996), but interactions in ELF also include interlocutors from the Inner and Outer Circles (Kachru, 1985), as it often happens at international conferences or meetings (Seidlhofer, 2004: 212).

<sup>1</sup> *Variation*, usually associated to ELF, is “the variable use of English as inter-community communication, as communication across communities” Widdowson (2015: 362).

The future of English will thus be determined by the role it will have both inter and intra-nationally and by those who will speak it as a second or foreign language.

English has become a 'shared' language, an inherently multilingual means of English-medium communication among people from different lingua-cultural backgrounds (Jenkins, 2015; Mauranen, 2018; Seidlhofer, 2017) and as a *sine qua non* for professional success and social inclusion. Due to the widespread use of ELF, English "has been deforeignized to become common property" (Widdowson, 2013:193).

In ELF, norms and usage are being co-constructed intersubjectively by multilingual interlocutors, and in the language classroom by both teachers and learners. However ELF has been defined, it is not only an extremely complex phenomenon, but "also one whose diversity is currently constantly increasing as more people from different language backgrounds engage in intercultural communication using English as one of their mediums" (Jenkins, 2015: 51)

In the growingly global contexts, though, classrooms have become inherently multilingual 'contact zones' where English is available as a contact language of choice, not necessarily chosen, and ELF can be described as a multilingual *lingua franca*. (Jenkins, 2015:76)

ELF research thus calls for a radical change in established ways of thinking, from a basically monolingual view of English that regarded the language as a separate code essentially the property of its native speakers, even when used for international communication, to the recognition of ELF as an appropriated communicative resource, its use characterized by continuous negotiation of meaning and linguistic adaptation and plurality (Seidlhofer, 2017).

The new scenarios offered by the multiple language and the transcultural flows, by the emergence of English as a *Lingua Franca* and by the role and function of the non-native speaker English teachers challenge existing paradigms and require a shift in perspective, particularly in terms of English language teaching, in terms of what English or whose English should be taught, but, mostly, how?

The findings from ELF studies have highlighted aspects of communication and unveiled features of language change that imply not only revisiting current curricular choices for English language teaching; the notion of authenticity, the new features of aural-oral interaction processes and of the native standard models are worth revisiting also for other languages that are not, at the moment, experiencing a change in terms of *lingua franca*.

Revaluing the potential of current ELF users' code-switching, translanguaging or code-meshing in interactions, for example, provides a new perspective in language teacher education and in language teaching through forms of enhanced reflective language awareness. Involving language teachers in recent research findings on current uses of English is a powerful teacher education tool as highlighted in the following statement on ELF-awareness, as...

[...] a continuous process of critical reflection, design, implementation and evaluation of instructional activities that reflect and localize one's interpretation of the ELF construct. (Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2018: 459)

### 3. *Approaches in English language teacher education in multilingual contexts: ELF awareness*

A process of individual change cannot be left to teachers' personal initiatives only, rather it requires specific language policies and a joint collaborative action through specially designed teacher education courses based upon a reflective approach (Schön, 1983) and language awareness. If awareness of the current plurality of English is raised in teacher education courses, there are good chances that this perspective will be taken into account by teachers afterwards in the classroom with their students.

The ELF-aware approach is a powerful tool to enhance teachers' reflection and to revisit their teaching practices; it is framed along three parameters (Sifakis 2019):

1. Awareness of language and language use in multilingual contexts and the role of translanguaging and meaning-negotiation strategies, through a reflective approach.
2. Awareness of instructional practice, including one's own underlying assumptions, through an analytical approach.
3. Awareness of learning, awareness of the ways learners use ELF and the ways in which their experiences may inform their competence development, through an ELF-oriented approach.

The assumptions underlying the ELF awareness approach are that:

- Learners are ELF users in their out-of-the-classroom experience.
- ELF is not a language and cannot be taught as a Foreign Language.
- ELF should be integrated within EFL contexts.

#### 3.1 Approaches in English language teacher education in multilingual contexts: the ENRICH PDC<sup>2</sup>

Along these lines, the ENRICH professional development course (Cavalheiro et al., 2021) was designed and implemented in multilingual contexts, adopting a variety of strategies for teacher development. The approach adopted elicited and enhanced teachers' awareness of changes currently occurring in English and induced a reflective perspective on the implications of teaching it within moveable sociolinguistic landscapes.

The ENRICH teacher education course devised and implemented in five different countries – the Erasmus+ “*English as a Lingua Franca Practices for Inclusive Multilingual Classrooms*” – meant to develop participants' own understanding of the role of English as a lingua franca in multilingual classrooms through an innovative ELF-aware pedagogy (Sifakis, 2019; Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2018; Cavalheiro et al., 2021; Sifakis et al., 2022)

The on-line 5-month course was meant to develop participants' own understanding of the role of English as a lingua franca in multilingual classrooms through an innovative ELF-aware pedagogy (Sifakis, 2019; Sifakis & Bayyurt, 2018). The

<sup>2</sup> <http://enrichproject.eu/> (last accessed 15 January 2024).



ENRICH PDC had been conceived on the findings of a Needs Analysis carried out in five countries - Greece, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Turkey - and investigating over 600 EL teachers' as well as over 500 learners' current habits and perceived needs (Lopriore, in Cavalheiro et al., 2021). The PDC was mainly geared at empowering English language teachers to integrate the current role of English as a Lingua Franca in their multilingual classrooms, thus to fundamentally rethink and revisit their teaching as well as its object, that is English, thanks to activities and peer exchanges. Teachers' ELF awareness was enhanced through reflective activities and within the Enrich course forum where teachers shared their views and personal beliefs on English language teaching. The implications for teacher education were based upon the perceived need to bridge the gap between how English works in real life and how it is taught in the EFL classroom. The structure of the ENRICH course (fig.2) is specifically organized on three main components: *Learning, Teaching and Using English* geared at empowering English language teachers to integrate the current role of ELF in their multilingual classrooms, thus enhancing their agency in teaching. This was done by:

- raising teachers' awareness of:
  - ELF discourse and its relation to multilingualism and diversity.
  - Effectiveness and appropriacy of past/current teaching practices.
  - Relevance between learning and out-of-school experience.
  - The characteristics and requirements of their local context.
- empowering teachers to help their learners:
  - Develop their ELF-related communicative competences.
  - Explore and, if necessary, adjust their *self-concept* as users and learners of English.

Fig. 2 – *The ENRICH PDC*





### 3.1.1 ELF-awareness in the ENRICH PDC course

The role of reflective ELF awareness within an educational linguistics perspective where the emerging dilemmas and implications in language education can elicit participants' voices through specific tasks and in the discussion forum, proved to be the most suitable approach in courses dedicated to the development of teachers' awareness of ELF (Sifakis, N. et al, 2022).

Teachers' reflection-on-action is meant to encourage teachers voice their thoughts on teaching, both individually and collaboratively, it can be prompted to explore English language in use, through 'noticing' (Schmidt, 2010) and 'language-ing' (Swain, 2006), mechanisms meant to prompt learners' additional reflection, facilitating learning through and about language. Through this process, teachers can identify both differences and similarities in language use, thus engaging in discussions regarding the degree of acceptance of non-standard uses of English (Lopriore, 2023a, 2023b)

## 4. *Teachers' responses to innovations: the integration of ELF*

The ENRICH PDC had meant to elicit participant teachers' awareness of the shift required when teaching a language as English that had so dramatically changed in the last two decades. In order to ascertain the impact that the ENRICH course had had on participants' responses to the innovation of the ELF-aware approach, it was chosen to collect their responses in two ways, one through a corpus based analysis of teachers' interventions during the course (Lopriore, et al, 2023) meant to analyze how the language they used unveiled their responses, and the second one was to elicit responses from those ENRICH participant teachers who had had a chance to introduce ELF in their classrooms after attending the course. Some of the teachers attending the ENRICH PDC run by the Italian team, were thus invited to participate in a joint presentation to answer the following question:

As you attended the ENRICH Course, what have you learnt during the course that you have decided to implement in your lessons because you regarded it relevant for your teaching? Can you provide one example and tell us why you chose this aspect and if you noticed any change in your students' responses and in your own response?

Among the teachers' responses, what follows is that of one of the Pakistani teachers Saima Abedi, chosen because she teaches in a multilingual context, English is the foreign language mostly taught at all levels of education, and she related what she had gained from the course to innovations she successfully introduced in her lessons. This response was also presented in the ENRICH Conference in Athens held in 2021<sup>3</sup>. She organized her response in three main sections:

1. Description of Pakistan multilingual context and of issues related to this condition faced by teachers in schools: Urdu, the national language spoken

<sup>3</sup> <https://enrich2021.eap.gr/> (last accessed 15 January 2024).

by only 7% of the population languages, dozens of languages spoken as first languages, and four of the provincial languages: Punjabi, Pashto, Sindi and Balochi.

2. Teachers' beliefs in terms of the relevance of standard English, and of an exam-oriented approach. Students' fear of failure and issues of identity. The new perspective gained through the course in terms of inclusivity and of language awareness allowed her to face and overcome her students' fears of making mistakes, of being mocked for their use of English, and of not being able to identify differences when listening to English language users.
3. Examples of ELF oriented practices that she introduced in the language classroom as a result of the ELF course. As for teachers' beliefs, she suggested the use of flexible class rules that would allow the use of code-mixing, of first language resources and of acknowledgement and appreciation of learners' contributions. As for meeting learners' needs, she introduced activities on identity recognition to build self-reliance, self-recognition and empathy, and encouraged tasks on international communication.

In these conditions, she said:

ELF awareness was an eye opener, it made my lessons more inclusive, because it allowed my students to own their status of English language users.

### 5. *Conclusions*

As teachers and teacher educators we continuously adapt and transform according to our beliefs and to the contexts we live in. During the ENRICH course, a specific effort had been made to actively involve English language teachers, as well as content teachers using English, in both individual and group tasks, prompting them to reflect upon the extent to which they were prepared to break away from conventional teaching practices that predominantly rely on standard language ideology maintained through familiar coursebooks. And this can be applied also to other languages in multilingual contexts.

ELF awareness proved to be a successful and meaningful tool to sensitize EL teachers to a new linguistic landscape where traditional approaches do not respond to learners' and teachers' needs.

Yet, awareness cannot be taught, it can only be enhanced through reflective approaches where teachers explore, discover and make decisions about the subject or the language they teach, or they use for teaching.

Language teacher education is a field where, according to local contexts and pedagogical traditions, different theoretical frameworks are being used, specific approaches adopted, course components differently combined, and teachers' and trainers' espoused theories and beliefs about English are often challenged and revisited. It is in this respect that ELF awareness, within the lines of educational linguistics, can help teachers gain their agency in educational contexts. They both approach 'education' as a process, investigate social settings in which people interact

to learn, to comprehend how interactions open up and how social structures are reproduced and challenged through language and other forms of meaning-making.

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